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## REVIEWS

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### A QUARTET OF COMPOSITION BOOKS

The chief reason for grouping the four texts to be considered at this time is the fact that they are all so different from each other—quite as different as the various voices in a mixed quartet. Three of the books to be considered have come from the press within the last twelve months and should therefore be expected to show as much of the modern influence as do the recent books for the junior high school. The other one appeared during the war and is very little known to the English teachers of the country. There is one trait these texts have in common: no year is assigned for their use. Perhaps an exception should be made in the case of *Effective Expression*, which, the author says, is designed for use in all the years of the high school and in the first year of college. There is more than a faint suspicion that if the authors had had specific levels of work definitely in mind, the texts might be more vital.

Mr. Edgar's book<sup>1</sup> carries a title which will appeal mightily to most teachers of English. We are all looking for the minimum and many of us are tired of having this phrase confined to grammar and mechanics. *A Minimum Course in Rhetoric* therefore sounds attractive. To heighten this impression Mr. Edgar has confined his text to eighty-seven pages and then added some hundreds of pages of appendix material. However, the first few appendixes are hints on writing which most of us would consider as matters of rhetoric, and farther on there is another ten-page appendix of optional rhetorical principles for advanced students. Besides this, the appendixes are made up quite largely of a presentation of grammar and of masses of drill material—chiefly the correcting-of-error type of drill material. The principles are stated concisely and clearly, though necessarily with less illustration than is desirable. The strength of this book lies in its definiteness; its weakness, in its lack of appeal to pupil interest. One of the assumptions stated in the very interesting and argument-provoking Preface is that skill comes only by frequent writing and sharp penalty. This seems to characterize the spirit of the book exactly. The author assumes that pupils wish to write or else know they must and therefore he makes no attempt to arouse their interest. Some hundreds of theme topics are given in

<sup>1</sup> *A Minimum Course in Rhetoric*. By Henry C. Edgar. New York: Century Co., 1922. Pp. 450.

Appendix XVI, but the actual inauguration of theme work is left wholly to the teacher. It would be possible for many of these assignments to be oral, but the organization of the book seems to assume that all practice will be written.

Somewhat similar to the Edgar book is Rhodes's *Effective Expression*.<sup>1</sup> Again there is no provision of undertakings in composition, but a mass of directions as to how composing may be done effectively. Far from being a minimum course in rhetoric, this text consists of 513 pages of rhetorical material. This is all devoted to the principles of effectiveness, no grammar or punctuation being included. The author, in his Preface, defines composition as "the process whereby raw material of thoughts and emotions is made into the finished product of effective expression." He insists that where pupils are shown how to find material and how to present it they are glad to do both these things. Quite consistently, he confines his directions for theme work to very general suggestions for practice upon the principles that have been presented in each chapter. As a reference book *Effective Expression* would seem quite useful, but as a text it seems to contain too much rhetoric and to be fatally lacking in the mechanics, including grammar and punctuation, and in furnishing pupils any urge to expression.

If the two books so far mentioned may be considered as the bass and tenor, perhaps Mr. Paul's slender volume<sup>2</sup> may be thought of as the alto. True to its title, it contains nothing but subjects, and these, the Preface informs us, are intended for such *written* work as is ordinarily done in the high school. It is valuable inasmuch as it does contain not merely a very large number of theme topics, but suggestions to start thinking and pictures to stir the imagination. Many of the subjects will appeal to high-school pupils, but not a few of them seem rather remote from the interests of adolescents. Teachers will find this a useful book to have upon the desk, but it seems doubtful if schools generally can afford to have it in the hands of the pupils, because it would have to be accompanied by a text presenting such materials as the Rhodes and the Edgar books do contain.

The leading part<sup>3</sup> in our quartet, that of the voice that carries the air, must be assigned to Law's *English for Immediate Use*. Fundamen-

<sup>1</sup> *Effective Expression*. By CHARLES ELBERT RHODES. New York: Gregg Publishing Co., 1921. Pp. 532.

<sup>2</sup> *Human Interest Composition Subjects*. By GEORGE F. PAUL. Syracuse, New York: C. W. Bardeen, 1916. Pp. 162.

<sup>3</sup> *English for Immediate Use*. By FREDERICK HOUK LAW. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921. Pp. 372.

tally the book consists of the description and discussion of a number of types of occasions for the use of language which occur in the lives of practically every high-school pupil. These type occasions and the ways to meet them successfully are first discussed in general, although with definite illustrations, and then a number of specific opportunities for the same sort of talking or writing are suggested and it is supposed that the pupils will make use of them. As one reads the text it seems likely that this supposition is correct. Most pupils will be interested. This book provides both oral and written composition, with the assumption that there will be immediate criticism, both praise and censure. It presents a very considerable amount of rhetorical theory, but always with reference to an immediate employment in the solution of a pupil's actual problem. It makes use of grammatical facts as a foundation of rhetorical effectiveness but confines itself to a mere statement of those facts, evidently assuming that they have been previously taught. This latter fact and the maturity of the ideas in general indicate that the book will be most successful in the third and fourth years of high school, although the author says it is adapted to any grade, from the junior high school through the senior high school. It appears, then, that Mr. Law's book is the only one of the four which will not have to be supplemented by another text or by very skilful and extensive work upon the part of the teacher. Moreover, there is about it a certain enthusiasm and spirit of optimism which lead one to speak of it as a positive book.

W. W. H.

#### A "USEFUL WEAPON" IN THE COMPOSITION CLASS<sup>1</sup>

I have the feeling that few secondhand copies of Morley's collection of familiar essays will ever be passed over the counters of student exchanges. Its appeal is too intimate: it is a book that one keeps. Like the ideal bed-book described in its pages, it gives "a limited, personal, mellow and companionable glow."

These essays range from John Macy's clear-visioned survey of American literature to the precious "Trivia" of Logan Pearsall Smith; from the sketch of Mary White, touching in its eloquent simplicity, to the droll jesting of A. P. Herbert on the uses of drawing when one is attending committee meetings.

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Essays*. Selected by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1921. Pp. 351. \$1.60. *Modern Essays for Schools*. Selected by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1921. Pp. 256. \$1.00.